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ABSTRACT

In order for genuine world peace to have a chance, communications professionals must consider a certain genre of communication--largely nonverbal and at a macroscopic level. There can be no lasting world peace where there is no world-wide principle of economic justice. The people of the industrialized power structures (seats of multinational corporations and centers of applied technology) have a moral obligation to seek means to protect a rapidly deteriorating world environment, to insure greater economic justice, and to lay a foundation for a just and lasting world order. This message must become grist for communication scholars and be the focus of classroom interactions. (Eleven references are attached.) (Author/MS)

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U. S. POLICIES IN THIRD WORLD: AN ECONOMIC PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

In this paper I consider the genre of communication (largely nonverbal and at a macroscopic level) that must be considered by communication professionals in order for genuine world peace to have a chance. The focus of my analysis is upon the message content transmitted by the relative economic neglect of the major powers toward Third-World countries. We of the industrialized power structures (seats of multinational corporations and centers of applied technology), I argue, have a moral obligation to seek means to protect a rapidly deteriorating world environment, to insure greater economic justice, and to lay a foundation for a just and lasting world order. This message, I allege, must become grist for communication scholars and be the focus of classroom interactions.

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U. S. POLICIES IN THIRD WORLD: AN ECONOMIC PERSPECTIVE

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Background of the Paper

Recently, I sat in a television room eating my lunch at our university union. In front of me was an international student I had not met previously. While not paying much attention to the television program, I noticed the student obviously was distraught. I caught enough of what was showing to notice that it was a dog food commercial. I spoke with the student, who turned out to have come from Africa, as he rose to leave. I noted that the commercial appeared to upset him and asked what he was thinking. He explained that in many parts of his country the display of food of any kind likely would cause a riot. For him, so recently in this country, the advertisement of food, especially food for animals, was unconscionable. Perhaps it is we who do not realize that our lack of understanding of this reality is at the root of the problem of beginning to provide for a lasting basis for world peace.

Overview

After discussions of cultural literacy among American university students and viewing a "60 Minutes" program on the subject, I asked my communication students in two classes to identify various persons and places. Some of my geographic examples were questions regarding major cities from various Third-World countries. In no case were the proper countries identified. In one class no one could identify the correct continent for the city of Tripoli, let alone recall why it had been in the news recently. This relatively unsophisticated study is indicative of the neglect we in higher education have

given to anything very far from the "me" and the "we" of our region.

As we approach the start of the 21st Century it becomes apparent that we are in a race between educational/cultural advancement on one hand and world disaster on the other. The "me" generation of today simply is not being equipped to be good citizens of the Western world, let alone to be good world citizens.

I believe peace, in one sense at least, is relatively easy in today's world. If this means the pseudo peace between major powers brought to us courtesy of the East/West arms race, world peace for now appears possible. Mutually-assured destruction with its nuclear posturing threatening the unthinkable -- the abomination labeled by Physicians for Social Responsibility as "The Last Epidemic" -- may have taken us to the brink of the abyss. Perhaps we have been sobered by the specter. But for millions of mothers, fathers, children, and young people in the Third World (and, yes, in abandoned car, back streets, and gutters of America and Western Europe), there can be no peace now or in the foreseeable future. It is this story that we in higher education must tell and tell again until others listen. There can be no lasting world peace where there is no world-wide principle of economic justice.

Sir Earnest Titterton (1986), British Ph.D. in physics and author of over 200 scientific papers, books, and public commentaries, wrote, "Although everyone claims to want it, we do not have peace even within families, or within a nation, nor internationally" (p. 12). He notes, that the modest progress of negotiators in nuclear arms limitations, will not bring international peace. He points to the gamut of disruptive national problems -- nationalism, racism, economic warfare -- that prevent world peace from a Third World perspective. Population pressures in the Third World countries

alone enhance the probability of continued world instability (p. 13). He contents that:

A major cause of tension between nations is the enormous disparity in standards of living between the haves and have-nots. Envy and covetousness are failings of humanity, as are selfishness and greed. Some 25 percent of the world (the developed Western nations) enjoys a very high standard of living, while another 25 percent has little to live for and, in fact, are facing starvation--many succumbing to it. (1986, pp. 14, 15)

Should not professional communication ethics cause us, as academics, to raise the question of economic justice before we have a moral right to expect and anticipate peace in our world?

Thirty-five internationally-thinking participants at the Wingspread Conference sponsored jointly by The Christian Science Monitor, the Johnson Foundation, and the University of Maryland-Baltimore recently sought to establish "An Agenda for the 21st Century" (Christian Science Monitor, July 25, 1988). I believe these conference delegates conceptualized global interdependence and the task of peace better than most of us. They quoted the Brandt Report, prepared by the Independent Commission on International Development under the chairmanship of former West German Chancellor Willy Brandt: "We are increasingly confronted with more and more problems which affect mankind as a whole, so that solutions to these problems are inevitably internationalized" (p. B 11). This genre of thinking and discussion, I feel, must take center stage in student speeches, discussions, and other forums to further motivate us to study interracial and intercultural communication. Every curriculum has hidden dimensions. In departments of communication in our country we find a number of courses designed to equip students with skills

to make them vertically mobile. Greatly de-emphasized is educating teachers and other true service professionals. We may not want to face it, but we are teaching for consumption, materialism, competition, capitalism, and other upper-middle class values in a world of dwindling, finite resources. The message we send to the Third World essentially is that we are not concerned about you, your needs, and your families. That, indeed, is a clear and profound communique.

Mortimer Adler noted "Our educational system is absolutely inadequate--not relatively [but] absolutely inadequate--for the purposes of democracy." He called for training in moral character development as essential for the 21st-century educational agenda (Kidder, 1988, p. 16). What we are doing in many of our universities reminds me of Joel Gray's song in Cabaret concerning money, money, money--money that makes the world go around. While tremendous forces are at work in our world, we educators contribute to the cultural myopia with our narrow focus supporting popular, contemporary cultural trends. The founders of the rhetorical tradition may be turning in their graves at the centering of contemporary culture on quantity above quality, technological quick fixes, and materialism. We (society) have drifted from the study of philosophy, the search for truth (the ultimate good), and from making the preparation for a better future as important; we have replaced these goals in the center of our motivation with living well for ourselves here and now.

We live in a shrinking, global village that needs to be struggling to become a global family. Our delicate, fragile ecosystem is in ever-increasing jeopardy. We Americans, five percent of the world's rapidly growing population, are consuming approximately one-half of the world's energy and of the world's other resources. This relative gluttony happens at a time when millions of persons in the third world suffer serious effects from

malnutrition and starvation. Jim Wallis put this into perspective:

Of every one hundred babies born in the world, forty will die before the age of six. Another forty risk permanent physical and mental damage because of malnutrition. Only three out of a hundred will get the education and skills they need to perform creative and meaningful work. (1976, p. 12)

If only three out of a hundred will get the education and skills needed, it is essential that this three percent have values as well as skills that will reflect a concern for human life internationally. American university students must be trained to be able communicators and must be armed with a true picture of the world we share with millions of other persons.

There are economic reasons preventing world peace today. In the recent UNICEF report, "The State of the World's Children 1989", it was reported that, ". . . half a million children died in the developing world last year because their debt-burdened governments have had to cut back on social spending" ("Children Die", 1988, p.10). For despite heavy debt loads and depressed living standards, very poor countries are sending their wealth to richer countries in increasing amounts--amounts that, according to the World Bank "will reach record levels this year and 50 percent above those of 1987" ("Third World Debt," 1988, p. A-3). Most third-world, developing countries are in serious difficulties with their economic growth stalled or declining and their resources to finance much needed changes drained by debt payment. The United States, the world's largest debtor nation, is expected to owe more than \$500 billion at the end of this year, yet the dollar continues as the world's key currency. Unlike Brazil, the developing nation with the most debt, the United States can pay its obligations in dollars--reflecting America's relative economic strength.

Needless to say, the transfer of resources from poor to rich countries is becoming a major political issue among developing countries. It should become, I believe, an ethical issue for American university professors and students. If we were given a microphone to the Third World what message would we send? What form of apologia would we make for our insatiable utilization of consumption of resources and our preparations for more and more consumption in the future while millions starve in Third-World countries? These are issues, I believe, for communication teachers and students.

The rapidly deteriorating conditions in Third-World countries are not harbingers of world peace. As the UNICEF report indicated:

Throughout most of Africa and much of Latin American, average incomes have fallen by 10 percent to 25 percent in the 1980s . . . In the 37 poorest nations, per capita spending on health has dropped by 50 percent and on education by 25 percent over the last few years

("Children Die", December 20, 1988, p. 10)

Economic realities are communication realities. If the development processes have slowed in the 1980s necessitating unprecedented borrowing, rising interest rates, falling commodity prices, and, often, inadequate investment of borrowed funds, one cannot expect world peace to be the result.

In seven nations, the estimated annual income per person exceeds \$9,000 a year--the United States, Canada, West Germany, Sweden, Norway, Saudi Arabia, and Australia. The per capita national income of Mauritania, a desert land of some 1.6 million people, is under \$500 a year. In Ethiopia, which has 34 million people, incomes are lower yet. Glass puts this into perspective:

Between now and the year 2000 some 2.5 billion human beings will be born. That means the world population will rise by 40 percent in the next 15 years. The vast majority of these babies will be born in debt-ridden

countries that cannot feed themselves. Who will? (1984, p. 6 C)

We must teach that the seeds of the future are being sown in economic patterns of the present. To not recognize this is to stick our heads in the sand.

Wicker (1989) quoted World Watch magazine where their editors indicated that The United States typically harvests 300 million tons of grain, and consumes 200 million. The balance is reserved and exported. However the 1988 crop was only 191 million tons and the domestic consumption took 202 million tons. Reserve stocks had to be used to bridge the gap and to provide grain for exports. 1987 was a year of harvest shortfall as well and reserves since have dwindled. What would happen if 1989 were to prove to be another dry year with significant harvest shortfalls? The obvious conclusion is that affluent countries might be forced to consider cutting their use of feed grain so that poor nations will not starve. Would they be willing to do that? Wicker (1989) concludes, "Even if the jet stream returns to a more usual course, harvests could still be down in this and coming years, owing to the so-called 'greenhouse effect'" ("Scene Outside," January 16, 1989, p. A-7). Recent predictions that the Soviet harvest was worse than expected have surfaced ("Soviet harvest," January 17, 1989, p. 1). Since the Soviets were reported to have been already facing a short supply of feed and had been importing much grain, the world picture is not promising. Chances for world peace will be reduced.

What Can We Do?

Centron, Rocaha and Luckins (1988) indicate that, ". . . the 'bottom line' syndrome that pervades society, causing both government and citizens to set their sights on short-term profits at the expense of the nation's future," (p. 29) must be overcome. This mentality will not yield without a great struggle. Mortimer Adler underscored this as he noted:

If you said to many people today, "You really have to suffer stringent reductions of your standard of living for the sake of your grandchildren and your grandchildren's grandchildren [since] we can't go on spending the way we're spending," they would be morally incapable of doing that. (Kidder, 1988, p. 17)

This is the message we need to get across in the 1990s in order to have a chance for world peace by the year 2000. Quality of life being more important than quantity of things in life, smaller can be better, and live more simply so that others may simply live can and must become themes in American higher education if there is to be any justice in our small world.

We can begin with teaching our children what we have not learned so well ourselves--to mediate and negotiate differences. With school violence on the rise, some teachers are turning to teaching the basics of interpersonal peace making. Students taught the skills of mediation and negotiation can serve as volunteer mediators. When students in conflict are given a choice between suspension and peer mediations, mediation is a popular choice. Mundell (1988) reports only two of 180 cases mediated were not resolved to the satisfaction of all parties in the Cambridge school system pilot program. This program offers promise (p. 21).

On the broader level we must realize that if we do not take steps to make world peace possible i.e., develop just economic systems, much less desirable alternatives will result. We see what might be the ghost of Christmas future in liberation theology. In its more benign form, liberation theology is an identification with the cause of the poor in our world. Liberation theology is profoundly anti-American and deeply hostile to the capitalist world. Rubenstein (1986) indicates that liberation theologians such as Gustavo Gutierrez see the world situation thusly:

In our world, characterized by radical injustice and exploitation, there is only one way to proclaim the Good News of Christ's liberation, to take sides with the poor in order to crush a "system of oppression" and to "lead to a classless society." (p. 47)

The time for choice making may be drawing to a close. Leadership is needed for regional and international conferences on how best to deal with Third-World debt and how to seek international cooperation in guaranteeing a future for developing countries that is based upon human justice. Such conferences need the public media attention given to nuclear arms limitation talks, biologic weapons, and the debate over reducing the American deficit.

The New Bottom Line For Communicators

Those of us connected with the professional study of human communication must recognize that in the place of truth we cannot substitute platitudes. We cannot afford to communicate with everyone and say absolutely nothing about the Third-World condition. Truth may be a sharp reproach rather than a polite tap on the shoulder. One thing we can do as scholar/citizens is to communicate that it is not just to continue on our present course. As Glass (1984) notes, "This year, the federal government plans to spend \$7.1 billion building nuclear weapons. For every \$1 spent on helping starving Ethiopians, \$65 will be spent on nukes" (p. 6 C). We must write about this injustice, speak the truth in public, and openly discuss these values in our classes.

It is time we take a world view and educate our students about how things really are for millions in a world which may be now too dangerous for anything but the truth and too much at risk for anything but justice.

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